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## SOCIALISM AND THE CLASS WAR.

### SUMMARY.

The doctrine of a class-war proclaimed by American Marxists, 512 — No class divisions or class struggles in the United States, 513 — Social reconstruction not dependent on a socialist party, 518 — How political and economic reforms are achieved, 520 — The evils of society are to be reformed separately, 525

THE economists have stated the essence of socialism to be—in the language of John Stuart Mill—"the joint ownership by all the members of the community of the instruments and means of production, which carries with it the consequence that the division of all the produce among the body of owners must be a public act performed according to rules laid down by the community."<sup>1</sup> As Schaeffle put it, "The Alpha and Omega of Socialism is the transformation of private and competing capital into a united, collective capital."<sup>2</sup> To this, however, the American Socialist party, acclaiming Karl Marx as its prophet, adds a doctrine of the "Class War" upon which it lays so much stress as to challenge its examination in the light of American conditions. "The struggle for mastery," says a writer in a text-book which is recommended by the Socialist party leaders, "is necessarily a class struggle, a struggle between the proprietary and the non-proprietary class. The interests between these two classes being diametrically opposed, a class struggle is inevitable. Nothing is so important as to keep clear the class character of the movement. When a laborer

<sup>1</sup> Fortnightly Review, April, 1869

<sup>2</sup> The Quintessence of Socialism, p 20 The Fabians say much the same Their manifesto declares that "our aim, one and all, is to obtain for the whole community complete ownership and control of the means of transport, the means of manufacture, the mines and the land "

realizes that he can only permanently improve his condition by improving the condition of his class, and realizes what his class interests are and how they can be advanced, he is said to be class-conscious. When he becomes class-conscious, he recognizes the class struggle and takes his stand with the class of which he is a member. A recognition of this fact of class antagonisms on the part of the whole working class and a united political action would enable them to master the public powers and put an end to capitalistic exploitation.”<sup>1</sup>

Two assumptions in this typical statement deserve examination:—

(1) That society is divided into two classes, between which, in the words of the New York State platform for 1907, “there can be no common interest or harmony.”

(2) That “united political action” must be taken by one of these classes which will “enable them to master public powers,” before society can expect to “put an end to capitalistic exploitation.”

First, what are the facts about class distinctions and class-consciousness in America to-day? What feelings, prejudices, judgments, affect the assumption that “the struggle for mastery is necessarily a class struggle, a struggle between the proprietary and non-proprietary class”?

American society is divided not into two classes, but into scores of classes,—divided by economic interest, sentiment, temperament, training. Wage-earners, salary receivers, investors, are stratified like thin-bedded rocks in multiple layers. The engineer receiving \$150 a month is separated as definitely from the Italian section-hand by a feeling of class pride and vested interest in his high pay as the president of the road is separated from the engineer. Engineer at \$150 a month and president at

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Socialism*, by Charles H. Vail, p. 164.

\$50,000 a year may conceivably each be earning more than his pay for the road he serves, but each would refuse to strike to aid the other, and both have a "class-consciousness" that excludes from their fellowship the section-hand quite as much as the capitalist stockholder. The independent farmer, whose gains are little more than wages for his toil, has less affinity with his fellow capitalists who own coal mines than with the harvest-hand whom he hires to get in the crops. The white carpenter or brick-layer shows more class prejudice against the negro teamster than the Jewish banker against his compatriot tailor. The shop-girl feels herself as superior to the domestic servant as the servant's mistress feels herself superior to the shop-girl. The workman who owns house and lot, to that extent a capitalist, will defend his 'ewe lamb' as stoutly against the *sans culottes* as an Astor will defend his regal rent-roll against the workman. Trade-union presidents accompany newspaper proprietors before congressional committees to seek the destruction of the paper trust, while employees of the trust are eager for its continuance. Railroad trade unions even protest against government regulation of rates. Russian immigrants, solicitous to keep the door open for their compatriots, tearfully protest when organized labor proposes to strengthen its own position by restraining immigration. Retail tobacconists have shown as strong hostility to the tobacco trust as ever did striking factory hand against "tyrant capitalist", independent refiners have fought the Standard Oil Company as bitterly as the Homestead strikers fought the Carnegie Steel Company; while miners have deported negroes and Chinese from gold camps as remorselessly as enraged mine owners deported rebellious strikers. In Colorado, where shooting is not infrequent in labor disputes, a government agent, while investigating the theft of public coal lands, was also shot.

"All these antagonisms, vividly present as they are in our society, expressive of the judgment of citizens on their interests, are based upon a delusion," say the believers in the Class War. "The warring elements are ignorant of the scientific basis of capitalist society, and we expect to convince them that in reality every man belongs to one of two camps, the camp of the propertied or the camp of the propertyless. We shall unite the propertyless into one army, with one common purpose, animated by one common impulse, the overthrow of the ever diminishing but powerful army of capitalists."

Such a task must be fraught with difficulties, because, first, a large part of our citizens have interests in the two armies both as exploiters and as workers, and, second, it is hardly possible to wipe out the class prejudices depending on race, color, occupation, and sentiment.

An increasing number of Americans own some property, —very little perhaps, but enough to give them an interest as small capitalists. Farmers own their homesteads, wage-earners have money in the savings-banks, foremen and superintendents hold stock, a million people own railroad bonds and shares, small shopkeepers cling to their little heap of goods. Around every big city the long streets of spacious houses are occupied by professional men and salaried employees who possibly produce for their employers more than they are paid, but who in turn keep servants, engage wage-earners, and are eager for dividends on their scattered investments. It is idle to argue that these classes are doomed to extinction, that the march of events will in some distant day force them wholly among the propertied or wholly among the propertyless. They show a stubborn vitality: they increase in numbers yearly.

Occasionally the struggle between organized labor and associated capital become so acute that a "war"

between them is waged, as in Colorado, Idaho, San Francisco; and the Marxian doctrine seems to be illustrated. Even in these most violent outbreaks, however, the struggle was not between all the propertied and all the propertyless, but only between sections of each side. Had the working folk of Colorado been one with the Western Federation of Miners, Mr. Haywood, its secretary, instead of receiving only a negligible vote, must have been elected governor. Had the business men of San Francisco been solid against Schmidt, the labor mayor, he could hardly have increased his vote in the respectable residential quarter at the second election.<sup>1</sup> In San Francisco the "labor" administration was used by corrupt business exactly as a "business" administration is used by corrupt business. In the heat of the first campaign, immediately after a disorderly and routed strike, passion may have welded most of the labor interests on the one side, most of the business interests on the other side. But Ruef, the convicted organizer of labor's forces, was a "business" lawyer, the incarnation of bad "business" principles; and Taylor, the man finally chosen by business to rehabilitate the city, was not a business man, but a scholar and (oddly enough) both a lawyer and a physician.

It is undeniable that an actual conflict over wages and conditions of labor, a conflict with truces and treaties, but no disarmament, is being waged between employers and employees in many standard industries. But the opposing forces include only a fraction of the people. Of the twenty-four millions engaged in industry, but eleven millions are capitalists or wage-earners, the remainder being farmers, tenants, professional, commercial, and agent classes. Even of these Professor John R. Commons calculates that "not more than six million

<sup>1</sup> See "The Mote and the Beam," by Lincoln Steffens, *American Magazine*, November, 1907

wage-earners and one and a half million employers" are in actual conflict.<sup>1</sup> Their importance is out of proportion to their numbers because they operate fundamental industries, such as railways and coal mines, and command strategic industrial points. To magnify them into the whole nation and base the expectation of a better social order solely upon the victory of the side numerically strongest is to ignore the great public which is beginning to assert its right to hold the balance between these two struggling classes.

Doubtless, in judging the merits of any skirmish in our many class wars, outsiders, from wage-earners who strike in sympathy when they have no quarrel of their own to judges who declare labor laws unconstitutional, are influenced by their association with one or other of the antagonists, by their education, social affiliations, and material interests, exactly as they are in judging the merits of a money controversy, a negro uprising, or an international broil. But that human weakness does not constitute them combatants nor divide all society into just two hostile camps.

In the presidential campaign of 1896 creditor and debtor were supposed to be natural antagonists. That was an approximation to a "class war," with the Haves fighting to keep and the Have-nots fighting to get. To oppose free silver was to endanger one's life in Nevada, to support free silver was to endanger one's employment in New York. But wage-earners without bank-books marched by thousands under the gold standard in the East and capitalists subscribed to the silver campaign in the West. Inheritance tax, railroad ownership, changes of the money system, may evoke similar passions again; but each side will be a conglomerate of many classes, a cross-section of the whole democracy.

<sup>1</sup>See Proceedings of the American Sociological Society at the meeting of December, 1907.

The second assumption growing out of the doctrine of the class war is that social reconstruction is conditional upon forming a Socialist party completely independent of all other parties, upon devoting all energies to fostering its growth, upon keeping it clear of contamination with the bourgeoisie, and declining electoral alliance under any conditions with any other parties. "The first step," says Mr. A. M. Simons, ex-editor of the *International Socialist Review*, "must be political union of the farmers and wage-workers for the purpose of electing their class into power. When this is done, they will have control of their own government and can enact measures in their own interests."<sup>1</sup> Absolute isolation, the obligation upon all party members to vote the full party ticket on all occasions, expulsion of any who support at election any non-party candidate,—this is the method adopted to insure fidelity to the doctrine of the "Class War." Unlike the Democratic and Republican parties, the Socialist party makes unmarred allegiance to the ticket a *sine qua non* of membership. In joining, one must forswear the right of private judgment as to electoral tickets and renounce independence in politics. For one of its members to support Folk, La Follette, Roosevelt, Johnson, or Hughes is counted treason. No measure can be of value unless it is passed by an avowedly Socialist legislature, say they. "The first step must be the organization of the farmers and wage workmen into a political party for the purpose of gaining control of the powers of government. Until this is done and the government is actually in the control of the producers, the farmers and wage-workers are *little interested in governmental actions*. Once the government is so controlled, once, in short, the Socialists are in power (and they can scarcely be expected to accomplish much before),—they

<sup>1</sup> The American Farmer, p. 174.



can use that government, state, national, or local, in the interest of the creators of wealth. For the first time in history there will be an opportunity for an intelligent choice as to the measures most desirable for the common good.”<sup>1</sup>

This method of political action assumes that the negro cotton picker in Louisiana, the Polish coal miner in Pennsylvania, the French-Canadian cotton spinner in Massachusetts, and the Italian section-hand in Dakota have interests so identical with the interests of the Irish brick-layer in New York, the Yankee printers, machinists, carpenters, and plumbers all over the country, and the farmers of the West and Middle West, that, inspired by a class fervor, they will all join hands, and, sinking the various differences about color, customs, skill, and wages, which to the ordinary observer widely separate them, they will unite in one political party, and, invincible by their numbers, will fight their Armageddon against their sole enemy, the capitalist class. In the mean time all the middle classes—people with small savings, small land holdings, or large professional incomes—will have disappeared. Therefore, the victorious proletariat, agreeing spontaneously upon the principles of social organization and income distribution, will straightway establish a socialized commonwealth. The political activities of the Socialist party are confined to recruiting the army with which to fight this battle. “The Socialist party does not pretend to stand for all the people. It honestly claims to stand for the working class against the capitalist class.”<sup>2</sup> One section of the party so far modifies its attitude as to admit that, when any Socialist representatives are elected, they may, without disloyalty, vote for Socialist measures proposed by other parties,

<sup>1</sup> *The American Farmer*, by A. M. Simons

<sup>2</sup> Article on “The Socialist Party, its Aims and Methods,” *The Worker*, October 12, 1907.

exactly as the French Socialist deputies voted for an income tax, the German Socialists for workingmen's insurance laws, and the English Socialists for old age pensions. But, pending the election of their own members, all of them "are little interested in governmental activities," until they control the government and are in power, "they can scarcely be expected to accomplish much."

Examination of the actual method of achieving political and social reforms in America indicates that this system of separatist political action, even so far as it is possible, is unlikely to be fruitful. It can create groups of malcontents who may carry on a destructive, guerilla warfare, but it is obstructive to the opening of an opportunity for an intelligent choice as to the measures most desirable for the common good.

The American method of getting things done politically is different from the European method. Across the Atlantic responsible governments draft laws, and with their majorities enact them, usually, as to great issues, after an election has been fought on them. Each legislative body has its recognized leader with its party cabinet, and general measures are proposed, fought over in the constituencies, and finally passed by party votes. The Trades Disputes' Act and the Education Act, the chief proposals of the government of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman in 1906, were discussed at a Parliamentary election, and the decision of the electors upon them was shown in the composition of the Parliament elected. In France the question of church disestablishment was fought out at various elections, and the composition of the Chamber of Deputies reflects the judgment of the electors upon it. In Germany an appeal was made by the emperor to the country upon the appropriations for the navy and for the colonies, and the Reichstag shows in its composition the country's decision.

But in America the method is different, particularly in the State governments. Both parties put into their platforms declarations in support of measures supposed to be popular, "weasel words" being used frequently to suck the meaning of the vital words, and so save alienating the opponents of the measures. The really vital plank of every platform is never written. It is, "Give to our party the spoils of office." Neither Democrats nor Republicans hold views for which they would sacrifice office concerning such matters as child labor, inheritance tax, eight-hour day, public ownership of monopolies, taxation of unearned increment in cities, public irrigation works with public ownership of the ditches and of the land reclaimed. One party is as likely as another to favor them.

Further, in state and city, laws are frequently not drawn and pressed to passage by the legislators. The elected persons are often only registering machines. Groups outside the State House prepare the measures, argue them before committees and can force them through by organizing public opinion in their favor. The elect, not the elected, rule. As Mr. James Bryce wrote: "Nothing is more remarkable about State legislators than their timidity. No one seems to think of having an opinion of his own. On burning questions—they are few and mostly personal—he goes with his party. On questions of general public policy he looks to see how the cat jumps, and is ready to vote for anything which the people or any active section of the people cry out for."

Professor A. Lawrence Lowell gives similar testimony. "In America at the present day," he says, "the issues do not make the parties." He examined the records of the divisions in sessions of the legislatures of New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois, and found that "except in New York the proportion of party

votes was never more than 16 per cent. and in several cases it was less than 2 per cent. Moreover, a part of these votes were cast in the election of officers who have no possible connection with policies." "Party issues can in the nature of things," he continues, "cover only a small part of legislation," and "the members of most of the state legislatures are elected by parties who have comparatively little connection with the questions they are called upon to decide."<sup>1</sup>

This divorce between parties and policies, as Professor Lowell demonstrates, grows from that organization of government which the American constitution and democratic institutions foster. Any party in America which gains majorities controls not policies, but 'offices and salaries. If administrative officers were all placed under civil service rules and legislators were unpaid, then running for office would not be running for a salary; but, so long as abundant spoils make the party boss, whether Republican, Democrat, Populist, or Socialist, in Lowell's phrase, "an office broker," citizens interested in a reconstruction of society through legislative action can secure measures, not by waiting until "they elect their class into power," but by framing bills which, if they commend themselves to public opinion, salary-takers must pass and administer.

Already far-reaching measures have been enacted by this method. For example, child labor laws, among the most drastic in the world, have been passed in New York by the following illogical plan. First, supporters of such laws voted for Republicans and Democrats without regard to their opinions on the child labor question, without even educating the candidates by trying to pledge them. Then a committee made investigations, drew model laws, and elaborated briefs in their support.

<sup>1</sup> The Government of England, by A. Lawrence Lowell, vol. II., chap. 35, pp 91-93

Newspapers were supplied with "copy," and, since the laws were not a party issue, the editors were free to give their support. Delegations of citizens called upon legislators, and swarmed in committee rooms at Albany to announce their support of the bills and to narrate the facts about the horrors of child employment. Of course, the opponents also appeared at the capitol and also "worked" the press. Then the legislators, awakening to discover that child labor was an urgent issue, tried to find the line of least resistance. A few had convictions, the majority waited to be told what to think. Letters, telegrams, deputations, poured in, the most telling stroke being the interviewing of legislators by insistent committees in their home districts at week-ends when they were seeking repose and seclusion. In proportion as the legislators found that a vote against the laws would set loose excited opponents to their own re-election, their convictions were formed and confirmed. Finally, a majority supported the first laws in 1904, and each subsequent year amendments have been passed by similar means.

A group of less than a dozen men, in two years, secured the adoption of the Australian form of ballot in Massachusetts. By analogous methods most varied measures—some of them found among the "immediate demands" of Socialist platforms, ballot reform, referendum and initiative, factory laws, franchise extensions, civil service rules, limitation of working hours for women, eight-hour laws for miners—have been put on the statute books in different States.

In federal elections for President and for the House of Representatives, issues are somewhat more prominent, tho members of the House usually gain greater popularity in their constituencies by securing appropriations for their districts for new post-offices, rivers and harbors, than for their advocacy of specific reforms. The members of the

Senate, being chosen by State legislatures, naturally represent, as a rule, the interests most powerful in the dominant political party, tho in the States that have evaded the Constitution by voting on the election of the United States senators at party primaries and making the result binding upon the State legislature the political opinions of the candidates influence the choice.

In Congress, as in the States, the actual passage of laws depends more upon the pressure of public opinion subsequent to election than upon the reflection of that opinion in the party color of those elected. The Reclamation Act, one of the greatest pieces of constructive legislation ever enacted, was passed as a non-partisan measure, as was also the Panama Canal Act. President Roosevelt's favorite measures of 1906-07, the Pure Food Law and that amending the Interstate Commerce Act, were passed with the help of Democrats. He was elected in 1904 because in general the voters indorsed his policies; but so illogical was the composition of the legislature that his own party would have rejected the measures he was apparently elected to forward.

A further reason for doubting the possibility of creating in America a single party informed by one motive and ruled by one disciplinary code is that in the different States political conditions are as various as the physical climate. America is not a country; it is a continent. No more can uniform lines of political action be laid down than they could for England, France, Spain, Italy, and Russia. In Texas, where hundreds of thousands of homesteaders are raising their first crops, each man working for himself, and in Washington, Oregon, and the Dakotas, where vast wheat areas and unrivalled orchards pour riches into the laps of self-employed farmers, political problems will not center around the employer and conditions of employment, as they may in the factory States

of New England. While the cotton growers in Carolina are opposing the federal courts over the State's right to force the railways to reduce passenger and freight rates, Oklahoma may be fighting to establish a State oil refinery in antagonism to the Standard Oil Company, Idaho demanding federal construction of irrigation works, and Massachusetts debating the purchase of the Boston & Albany line.

Circumstances will determine, inevitably, through what organizations the advocates of the respective measures operate. In one city they may organize an independent party for a city election, in another fuse with an opposition party. Here they may find a magnetic leader who will rejuvenate an old party, there they will antagonize all old parties. Now the workmen may advance a "walking delegate" as their standard bearer, again a "parlor Socialist" may carry their banner. Sometimes public opinion will weary, and presidential candidates be unanimously conservative. Again, the country will be in a fevered haste for change, and candidates all protest their radicalism. Political life is complex and variable. It can be embraced by no simple formula. Compromise, expediency, half-measures, have ever been its characteristics. "Class war"—fanatical, doctrinaire, unbending—might conceivably tear down an old civilization. It could never build a new civilization.

Clearly, then, contrary to the Marxian assumption, "the evils from which modern society suffers *are* . . . to be solved separately." Each reform included in the Socialist's own platform, if it come within the range of practical politics, will attract a fresh band of supporters and alienate some who rallied for previous reforms. It were idle to expect that even a considerable minority of a nation could understand the subtleties of Marxian doctrine, even if these subtleties were demonstrably true. A band of devoted

souls, well grounded in the reasons for their faith, may conceivably form a nucleus of a political movement. They may be the regulars enlisted for the whole war, but most of the regiments fighting for any measure consist of militia enlisted for a particular campaign.

Taxation of city land values, if ever accepted, is likely to be imposed with the help of business men and employers of labor, who, finding their rents rising, may possibly be more enthusiastic for land taxation than their own employees. An inheritance tax, graded so as to leave small fortunes almost exempt, while appropriating for the community the upper part of large fortunes, seems to appeal as strongly to the interest of the man of moderate means as to the scavenger and the hobo. Public ownership of the railways was made a political issue not by city slum dwellers, destitute of everything but muscle, but by farmer Populists, owners of their own homesteads. Trade unionists are as hostile to compulsory arbitration of labor disputes which the public, a great sufferer during a strike, is beginning to demand, as are their opponents, the associated employers. A system of trade schools, designed to make every man a skilled workman, will possibly be opposed by organized labor and supported by disinterested educationists and organized capital. Public health regulations, under which the state gives free service to individuals, receive more help from rich doctors than from penniless plebs. A Republican party, not void of capitalistic elements, was more active in establishing the National Forest Reserve, a great piece of collectivism, than either the American Federation of Labor or the Socialist party. Child labor committees are composed of every sort of person without regard to occupation or wealth. A factory owner in Connecticut, quite as much as his employees, has an interest in the retention of national ownership of the minerals under lands still in gov-



ernment possession, if cheaper coal will result. Merchants in New York and Buffalo were more eager for an enlarged ship canal from the lakes to New York, to be built and operated by the public, than were the propertyless crowds in those two cities. Labor colonies for unemployed wanderers are advocated by charity organization societies and railroad corporations.

Every step towards that co-operative commonwealth which Socialists agree is their goal must be proved advantageous to the nation before it will be taken, and the friends and foes of different steps will vary. It is a misleading assumption that we are divided, here in America, into goats and sheep, with the sheep on the right hand of Karl Marx, and the goats on the left. Most human beings are quick, perhaps, to see the change which will serve their personal interest at the moment, hard to convince when the public good requires the sacrifice of that interest. The immediate material interest of any man, wage-earner or capitalist, might put him, however, on opposite sides at different times.

To sum up, the doctrine of the class war is untrue to many of the facts. If it were true, it would be irrelevant to the main issue which Socialists raise, the establishment of a co-operative commonwealth, and insistence upon it distracts attention from the only method of social reconstruction possible, while raising hopes of a furious transformation which, in the nature of the case, cannot be fulfilled.

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